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TITLE: Responsible Adolescents in the Times of AIDS (RATA): A Comprehensive Health Promotion Workshop for Youths in Nigeria

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ISSUE: Recent reports indicate that there is increasing rate of sexual intercourse amongst Nigerian Adolescents. The downturn in the nation's economy has resulted in youths becoming involved in sexual networking to earn a living. In addition to this increasing sexual activity is the fact that youths are at a higher risk of various reproductive health problems as compared to adults. Reports show that youths are poorly informed about reproductive health and their main sources of information on such intimate subjects are peer groups, friends or schoolmates with the media contributing moderately. Parent/Guardians play the least role in supplying teenagers with pertinent information in the area of sexuality and reproductive health. From the above, youths are more likely to practice unprotected sexual intercourse, involve in cult activities, drugs and alcohol consumption and less likely to use contraceptives, especially condoms for the prevention of unwanted pregnancies and sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) including HIV/AIDS.

PROGRAM: A preliminary finding from studies carried out [Using Key Informant Interviews, Focus Group Discussions] amongst youths between 14-24 years of age in Warri Nigeria revealed a poor risk perception and lack of information on reproductive health. In addition there is a high rate of STDs, unwanted pregnancies, domestic violence, drug and alcohol use. From the findings, it became clear that a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health program is imperative for these Youths. In order to stem the tide of this health and social problems, a piloted reproductive health promotion workshop was organized for 200 targeted youths from randomly selected secondary schools in Warri, Nigeria. The theme of this comprehensive workshop was "Responsible Adolescents in the Times of AIDS" [RATA]. The workshop consists of series of lectures on HIV/AIDS, Drug Abuse, Rape, and Sexual abuse amongst Youths and the Role of Peer Educators in the Times of AIDS. Film Show (Broken Wings), Focus Group Discussions, Quiz Competition, Dance drama, Poetry etc. were also conducted with the youths participating. Handout, IEC materials and Souvenirs were also distributed to the Youths during the workshop to enhance their advocacy and to allow sustenance of the knowledge impacted. At the end of the workshop, it was unfolded that these Youths can take decisions that will protect them from reproductive health hazards, promote safe sex practice and become peer educators and role models to other Youths in their community.

LESSON LEARNED: Though RATA is a pilot project, the benefits of the workshop cannot be overemphasized. The post workshop focus group discussion revealed more informed youths that were ready to take responsible decisions on their reproductive health. Moreover, the participatory approach by the youths enhanced their positive response to the consequences of STDs, unwanted pregnancies, drug abuse and violence. It is hoped that in the near future, a modified form of this program will be extended to parents, guardians and teachers in this community in order to enhance its success.

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